PB90-116781

Modeling Geochemical Processes Attenuating Inorganic Contaminant Transport in the Subsurface Region Adsorption on Amorphous Iron Oxide

(U.S.) Environmental Research Lab., Athens, GA

1989

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1. REPORT NO.	2.	3. PB90-116781
EPA/600/D-89/171		

4. TITLE AND SUBTITLE
MODELING GEOCHEMICAL PROCESSES ATTENUATING INORGANIC CONTAMINANT TRANSPORT IN THE SUBSURFACE REGION: Implementing Adsorption Processes

5. REPORT DATE

6. PERFORMING ORGANIZATION CODE

7. AUTHOR(S)
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8. PERFORMING ORGANIZATION REPORT NO.

9. PERFORMING ORGANIZATION NAME AND ADDRESS
*Environmental Research Laboratory, USEPA, Athens GA.
**Technology Applications, Inc., Athens GA
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10. PROGRAM ELEMENT NO.
ABWD1A

11. CONTRACT/GRANT NO.

12. SPONSORING AGENCY NAME AND ADDRESS
Environmental Research Laboratory - Athens, GA
Office of Research and Development
U.S. Environmental Protection Agency
Athens GA 30613

13. TYPE OF REPORT AND PERIOD COVERED

14. SPONSORING AGENCY CODE
EPA/600/01

15. SUPPLEMENTARY NOTES

16. ABSTRACT

The capability of an equilibrium speciation model, MINTEQA2, for estimating total dissolved (and, hence, mobile) metals concentrations in the saturated zone below hazardous waste disposal sites was evaluated in laboratory studies. Emphasis was placed on testing the geochemical speciation portion of the model.

17. KEY WORDS AND DOCUMENT ANALYSIS

a. DESCRIPTORS	b. IDENTIFIERS/OPEN ENDED TERMS	c. COSATI Field/Group

REPRODUCED BY
U.S. DEPARTMENT OF COMMERCE
NATIONAL TECHNICAL INFORMATION SERVICE
SPRINGFIELD, VA. 22161

18. DISTRIBUTION STATEMENT	19. SECURITY CLASS (This Report)	21. NO. OF PAGES
RELEASE TO PUBLIC	UNCLASSIFIED	24
	20. SECURITY CLASS (This page) UNCLASSIFIED	22. PRICE

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EPA/600/D-89/171

MODELING GEOCHEMICAL PROCESSES ATTENUATING INORGANIC CONTAMINANT TRANSPORT IN THE SUBSURFACE REGION: ADSORPTION ON AMORPHOUS IRON OXIDE

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INTRODUCTION

Many suspected or acknowledged environmental problems are national in scope. From a regulatory context, the ability to resolve these problems is greatly complicated by: 1) vagaries in current scientific knowledge concerning these problems, 2) the wide variety of environments that may be affected by these problems, and 3) the differences that may arise between legal and scientific perceptions of these problems.

As a case in point, recent additions to the Resource Conservation and Recovery Act (RCRA), enacted through the Hazardous and Solid Waste Amendments (November 8, 1984) require the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) to develop regulatory programs for implementing Congressionally mandated land disposal restrictions for wastes containing metals. In support of this effort, EPA's Environmental Research Laboratory, Athens has been commissioned by the EPA's Office of Solid Waste to develop a computer model to predict transport and transformation of inorganic contaminants in the subsurface environment and evaluate the potential for human exposure in drinking water. From a scientific perspective, the transport of inorganic contaminants is subject to a wide variety of chemical and hydrological processes, many of which either are poorly understood or, if understood, are model input intensive, requiring extensive information that is often difficult to obtain even on a site by site basis. As a consequence, one provision for the computer model under development is that the model be applicable in a generic (nationwide) context where the overall uncertainty of model predictions can be quantified.

The requirement for quantifying the uncertainty associated with model predictions leads to a second consideration-- the concept of model "validation." In the ideal site-specific situation, the gross uncertainty associated with model predictions can be determined by comparison of model predictions

with an established database containing sufficient information to document the variables of concern. Furthermore, error propagation derived from the individual model source terms also would be available. Unfortunately, field testing a coupled transport geochemical speciation model is prohibitively resource intensive.

The approach with the present effort-- the subject of this paper-- is to provide a broad spectrum of diverse evidence that, taken together, leads to scientific (and regulatory) confidence in the model's predictive capability. The present strategy is to include field studies, laboratory investigations and peer review evaluations in sufficient number and detail as to support a convincing argument for the model's predictive accuracy in the face of intense scientific and regulatory scrutiny.

The present investigation was undertaken as one element of a research program to develop and test (validate) methods for predicting the leaching, transport and potential groundwater contamination threat of metals for generically defined land disposal sites. Specifically, the capability of an equilibrium metal speciation model (MINTEQA2) for estimating total dissolved (and hence, mobile) metals concentrations in the saturated zone below hazardous waste disposal sites was evaluated in laboratory studies.

The MINTEQA2 program is an updated version of the precursor MINTEQA1 geochemical speciation code (Brown and Allison, 1987) that incorporates a diffuse layer electrostatic adsorption model option (Dzombak, 1986) and a built-in database of intrinsic thermodynamic adsorption constants for a large variety of potential metal contaminants interacting with amorphous iron oxide substrates. The current strategy for testing the geochemical speciation portion of the model is the focus of this paper.

Modeling Strategy

The chemical and physical processes governing the partitioning behavior of inorganic contaminants in the sub-surface environment may include a large variety of thermodynamic equilibrium, disequilibrium and/or kinetic-limited processes that are understood from a scientific perspective to only a limited degree. Figure 1 illustrates a schema for incorporating a thermodynamic equilibrium chemical process component into a predictive exposure assessment tool.

Several points should be made before discussing the individual components in Figure 1. First, although the model must be generic in nature, the uncertainty associated with individual components necessarily requires assessment on a site-specific basis. Second, the required precision and accuracy for each component is bounded primarily by the least precise, heavily weighted component (that is, if the uncertainty in one major component is $\pm$ 50 %, then 4 digit accuracy in a less significant component is unnecessary). Third, where the scientific knowledge is insufficient for quantifying uncertainty, then assumptions used in the effort must be conservative. (Conservative is defined in this paper as protective of the environment). Fourth, a generic approach likely will be composed of both statistically characterized distributions and worst case assumptions.

The uppermost box in Figure 1 displays the goal of deriving a defensible partitioning/transport model. The least resource intensive means of achieving this goal depends on resolving and, where necessary, minimizing the uncertainty associated with each of the individual processes at the lowest, practical level of the pyramid in Figure 1. For example, resolving the significance of one of the individual chemical processes is best achieved at the laboratory level. If a given process is significant, yet poorly understood, then the probability of making mistakes in field data collection is magnified greatly.

The usable results from such a study may be seriously compromised and the wasted resources associated with these mistakes may be orders of magnitude greater than would be encountered in a laboratory setting.

Physico-chemical Processes Influencing Potential Contaminant Transport

The individual chemical processes in Figure 1 represent a compendium of potential known chemical processes that may have a significant impact on the partitioning of inorganic contaminants in the subsurface environment. These processes have been categorized (perhaps artificially) into those that may promote transport and those that may inhibit transport. Of these two categories, those promoting transport are generally the best understood. For example, the thermodynamic relationships among free ion activities, inorganic complexes, and organic anthropogenic complexes have a substantial historical background in the scientific literature. The relationship between free ion activities and complexation with naturally occurring dissolved organic matter (DOM) is much more ambiguous. Although there is substantial on-going research devoted to metal ion/DOM complexation processes, this process has been ignored in the present work based on the following analysis.

Given: a. a generous groundwater organic carbon content can be estimated as 10 mg/L (Loux et al., 1988)

b. a generous "complexation capacity" for a 10 mg/L fulvic acid solution can be estimated as 20 micromolar (estimated from Weber, 1983).

c. organic carbon is known to bind much more strongly to trivalent cations (e.g. Fe(III), Al(III) etc.) than to divalent or monovalent cations (Bowers and Huang, 1987; Byler et al., 1987; Backes and Tipping, 1987)

d. a low-amorphic-iron-content sandy aquifer material was characterized as possessing a porosity of 33 % and an amorphous iron content of 0.077 %

Therefore:

a. the quantity of amorphous iron exposed to 1 L of groundwater can be estimated by:

Total Volume = 1 L/0.33 = 3 L
Solid Volume = 3 - 1 = 2,000 cm^3
Solid Mass = (2000 cm^3)(2.5 g/cm^3) = 5000 g

Am. Fe mass = (5000 g)(0.00077) = 3.85 g

b. the "molar" iron content available for complexation with DOM is therefore:

[Fe] = 3.85/55.85 = 0.07 M

c. the ratio of [Fe] to DOM complexation capacity is then:

[Fe]/CC = 0.07/20E 6 = 3500

This exercise suggests that, under equilibrium conditions in a low iron content aquifer material, iron (and other major ions commonly found in groundwater) may tend to out-compete potentially toxic transition metals for DOM complexation sites.

The high ionic strength term listed under the transportable category in Figure 1 represents potential difficulties in estimating ionic activity coefficients at higher ionic strengths. The two activity coefficient algorithms in MINTEQA2 include the Davies extension (Davies, 1962) and the extended Debye-Huckel expression with the Helgeson (1969) procedure for estimating neutral species activity coefficients (Truesdell and Jones, 1974). The Davies extension is believed to be adequate for ionic strengths less than 0.5 M; the extended Debye-Huckel procedure is presumably even more robust. Because most shallow groundwaters have ionic strengths in the range of 0.01 to 0.001 M, errors in activity coefficient correction estimates should be relatively minor.

The possibility of insoluble contaminant migration via colloidal particle transport is a relatively recent concern in the scientific literature (Keswick, Wang and Gerba, 1982; Buddemeier and Hunt, 1988; Gschwend and Rey-

nolds, 1987; Cerda, 1988; McCarthy, 1988). If colloidal particles are ubiquitous and if they bind significantly with contaminants, then this phenomenon must be accounted for in predictive fate and transport modeling efforts. Research on colloidal particle formation, aggregation and transport is the subject of extensive research by many investigators.

The last category in the transportable section of Figure 1 includes the oxidation-reduction potential. Virtually all of the 14 potential contaminants of concern to the EPA Office of Solid Waste (Ag, As, Ba, Be, Cd, Cr, Cu, Hg, Ni, Pb, Sb, Se, Tl and Zn) can display partitioning behavior that is either directly or indirectly influenced by the redox status of the groundwater. The difficulties associated with obtaining experimental estimates of the thermodynamic Eh of low temperature groundwater systems is well known (Whitfield, 1974; Lindberg, 1983; Lindberg and Runnells, 1984; Rose and Long, 1988). In addition, low temperature systems may be in inherent disequilibrium (Lindberg and Runnells, 1984; Runnells, 1989). Given these difficulties, the present approach for accounting for Eh includes: 1) focusing both laboratory and modeling efforts on individual ionic species [i.e., As(III), As(V), Cr(VI), Se(IV), and Se(VI)], 2) statistically characterizing groundwater chemistry (i.e., use distributions including the absence or presence of sulfides), and 3) development of new analytical methodologies for measuring Eh and accounting for disequilibrium effects.

Physico-chemical Processes Influencing Potential Contaminant Immobilization

The second major category in the base of the pyramid in Figure 1 includes processes that may immobilize contaminants through solid phase partitioning. Unlike those processes that may render contaminants transportable, ignoring any of the processes that may immobilize contaminants is considered conserva-

tive. Specifically, scientific accuracy is desirable; however, errors in the process models must lie in a conservative direction.

Of all of the processes that may immobilize contaminants, those that lead to precipitation of highly crystalline pure mineral phases are the best understood and have received the most scientific scrutiny. Potential contaminant immobilization through amorphous phase or solid solution formation processes may be significant, however, these processes are insufficiently understood (or documented) to permit their current assessment on a routine basis. For example, preliminary work on the pH-dependent partitioning of Ba indicates that a solid solution component may be necessary for interpreting laboratory data. In an analogous manner, as will be demonstrated in a later section of this paper, the pH-dependent behavior of Cd is best described by the formation of an amorphous $CdCO_3$ phase.

The second major immobilization process, adsorption, has received considerable attention in both "multiphase" soils partitioning studies and pure phase laboratory studies. It is well known that pure amorphous and crystalline hydrous oxides of iron, manganese, silica, and aluminum-- in addition to aluminosilicate and particulate organic carbon phases-- can all exhibit differential, pH-dependent affinities for ionized inorganic contaminants. Difficulties in quantitatively modeling adsorption in a multiphase sediment can be grouped into at least two general areas. First, there exists an experimental inability, at present, to definitively discern those interfacial processes limiting contaminant solubilities. With present scientific knowledge, it is clear that the adsorptive process may serve either as an intermediate step in a precipitation process or as a solubility limiting process in itself. Mathematically, this experimental limitation translates into a conclusion given by Westall and Hohl (1980). They suggested that, for a given set of experimental data, simple adsorption models can describe surface amphiprotic behavior with

a facility equal to that of sophisticated techniques. Second, with the present implementation strategy, a multiphase sediment is viewed as a collection of independent phases. More recent work (Honeyman, 1984; Honeyman and Santschi, 1988) suggests that metals adsorption in a multiphase system may or may not be additive (with respect to the sum of the individual contributors).

The selection of the MIT Diffuse Layer Adsorption Model (MIT DLM-Dzombak, 1986) for the present modeling effort was based on an attempt to address several limitations in addition to those given above. For example, an advantage with the MIT DLM is the built-in database of intrinsic adsorption constants. Figure 2 displays relationships observed in the literature (Schindler, 1981; Dzombak, 1986; Smith and Jenne, 1988) between the log metal ion first hydrolysis constant and the intrinsic adsorption constants required for a variety of models and pure phase surfaces. Two points can be discerned from Figure 2. First, periodicity can be observed in the adsorption behavior of metals on hydrous oxide surfaces. This periodicity can be used both to identify anomalies in experimental data and to predict intrinsic adsorption constants when experimental data is unavailable. Second, given that these constants were obtained for a wide variety of surfaces and significantly different models, the slopes of these relationships are remarkably similar, which suggests that these models may be approaching a more fundamental thermodynamic understanding of interfacial processes.

All three models given in Figure 2 describe "surface complexation" between metal ions and, for example, an adsorptively active iron oxide site (=FeOH) in terms of the following general relationship.

$$K_{ads,\ Me} = \frac{[=FeOM^{z-1}][H^{+}]EXP(-e\Psi/kT)}{[=FeOH][M^{z+}]EXP(-ze\Psi/kT)} \qquad (1)$$

Expression 1 is analogous to a solution complexation counterpart where a metal ion exchanges for a proton. The principal difference is that estimates of mobile ion concentrations (H^+ and M^{Z+}) are modified by the Boltzmann expression [EXP($-ze\Psi/kT$), where Ψ = "interfacial electrostatic potential," z = ion valence, e = electron charge, k = Boltzmann constant, T = absolute temperature]. The surface potential can seldom be determined experimentally without ambiguity. It is more commonly estimated using the Gouy-Chapman one-dimensional solution to the Poisson-Boltzmann charge/potential relationship in conjunction with zero (MIT DLM; simple DLM), one (Bowden et al., 1977), or two (Triple Layer Model, Davis and Leckie, 1978) capacitative relationships.

From a preliminary sensitivity analysis, the electrostatic terms in expression 1 tend to have a second-order effect on the predictions of metals partitioning behavior (especially when compared to variations in groundwater pH). The surface potential term has been retained in our current effort for four reasons. First, surface potential terms are required in current Derjaguin-Landau-Verwey-Overbeek based models of colloidal particle stability. Second, electrostatic surface charge terms have been useful in describing perturbations in adsorbed state pH-sensitive organic compound degradation processes (Hartley and Roe, 1940; Metwally and Wolfe, 1989). Third, electrostatic terms may be important for describing metals partitioning behavior in very low ionic strength groundwater systems. Fourth, with the MIT DLM, there are no additional model input parameters needed with or without an electrostatic term.

Comparison of Experimental Data With Model Predictions

The data presented in Figures 3 and 4 summarize the results obtained in a recent study on saturated zone aquifer materials (Loux et al., 1989). From a preliminary study to examine the pH-dependent partitioning behavior of cation-

ic inorganic contaminants on six aquifer materials, it was observed that the Wisconsin material-- a high sand content (99.3 %), low cation exchange capacity (7.1 cmol/kg), and low amorphous iron content (0.077 %) sediment-- had the least affinity for eight cationic contaminants (Ba^{2+}, Be^{2+}, Cd^{2+}, Cu^{2+}, Ni^{2+}, Pb^{2+}, Tl^{+} and Zn^{2+}) over the pH range from 4 to 9. Subsequently, a more detailed sequence of 48-hour, batch, adsorption experiments was conducted with the following experimental procedures/conditions:

Solids Conc. = 132 g/L
Initial $[Me^{z+}]$ = 3.13 mg/L
T = 25 degrees Centigrade
Analysis by Inductively Coupled Plasma Atomic Emission Spectrometry (with Myers-Tracy Signal Compensation).
Separation by centrifugation for 46 minutes at 10,000 RCF.

Of the trace metals, only Ba and Zn were present at sufficient concentrations in the sediment to require adjustment for subsequent modeling efforts. In general, limiting equilibration to 48 hours was considered conservative because both adsorptive and precipitative mechanisms will lead to further loss of metals from solution with an increase in sediment exposure time. For additional details concerning the experimental procedures, the reader is referred to the original document.

Figure 3 displays the pH-sensitive partitioning behavior observed with all eight cations on the Wisconsin aquifer material. As observed with all of the aquifer materials, Pb tends to be removed from solution far more strongly than any of the other elements. Ba and especially Tl tended to show the least pH dependence of all of the metals. In the mid-pH region, a general affinity sequence can be represented by:

Pb > Cu, Be > Zn > Cd > Tl > Ni, Ba

A comparison of the above affinity sequence with the sequences observed in the literature (Dzombak, 1986; Rai and Zachara, 1984; Gadde and Laitinen, 1974;

Elliott et al., 1986) leads to several observations. First, the relative positions of Pb and Cu suggest that hydrous oxide sites may be significantly removing these elements from solution rather than particulate organic carbon (hydrous oxides display affinity sequences ordinally related to the respective metal ion log first hydrolysis constants (Figure 2); organic carbon displays sequences more related to the Irving-Williams (1948) sequence (i.e., Cu is bound more strongly than Pb-- Stevenson, 1977; Mantoura et al., 1978; Alberts and Giesy, 1983). Second, the position of Cd in the sequence suggests greater removal from solution than would be expected by an adsorptive process on a hydrous oxide surface. Third, the relative position of Tl in the affinity sequence is strongly pH-dependent since Tl is strongly removed from solution at low pH conditions and weakly removed from solution at high pH values (relative to the other elements).

Figure 4 displays the results from MINTEQA2 simulations of the data given in Figure 3. These simulations were performed including both adsorptive processes on the amorphous iron oxide (MIT Diffuse Layer Model; Dzombak, 1986) and pure phase precipitation of $CdCO_{3,am}$, $BaSO_{4,am}$, $Pb(OH)_2$, $Cu(OH)_2$, $Zn(OH)_2$, $Ni(OH)_2$, and $Zn(OH)_2$. Figure 5 compares the experimental data (Figure 3) with model predictions (Figure 4) for Pb, Zn, Ni, Cd and Cu. Those data points in Figure 5 below the "zero" line represent conservative estimates (i.e., model-predicted soluble metal concentrations exceed experimental values).

From Figures 3, 4 and 5, the behavior of Pb, Zn, and Ni was mainly conservative and best described by adsorptive phenomena. According to the model, at low pH conditions, adsorption was the only process limiting the solubility of these elements. The behavior of Cd, also mainly conservative, was best described using a solubility constant for amorphous otavite ($CdCO_3$).

The behavior of Cu was not well described by the model; Cu may have formed soluble complexes with dissolved organic matter (not implemented in the

model). From Figure 5, the model predictions for Cu are not conservative and hence are unacceptable.

The behavior of Ba was poorly described by both adsorption and solubility constraints from either amorphous or crystalline barite. The solubility of Ba may be limited by a solid solution with calcite (a process not presently in the model). The model simulations for Be were performed by: a) ignoring an amorphous $Be(OH)_2$ phase (model simulations were not conservative), b) ignoring aqueous phase hydroxy complexes (with the available complexation constants, the model simulations led to virtually zero removal from solution in the pH range of 4 to 9), and c) including adsorptive phenomena where intrinsic adsorption constants were obtained using linear free energy relationships (Dzombak, 1986) with the log first hydrolysis constant (5.4-- Smith and Martell, 1976). The adsorption envelope given for Be in Figure 4 is promising although additional work is required.

Tl^+, the last element in Figure 3, was not modeled. Tl^+ exhibited significant removal even at low pH conditions. At least two possible explanations can be given to describe the behavior of this element: 1) co-precipitation with Pb phases etc., and 2) adsorption with subsequent oxidation to insoluble $Tl(OH)_3$ on manganese oxides (Gadde and Laitinen, 1974). Neither mechanism is presently in MINTEQA2.

Several trends were observed in the comparison of experimental and modeled data. First, the pH-dependent partitioning behavior of three of the four elements expected to bind most strongly with amorphous iron were indeed best described by adsorption processes on aquifer amorphous iron (Cu being the one exception). Second, model predictions for soluble metal concentrations at low pH conditions tended to be consistently conservative; one or more additional adsorptive phases will probably be required before the accuracy of model pre-

dictions is increased. Third, those elements not expected to adsorb strongly on amorphous iron oxide (Ba and Tl) display solubility limitations not presently addressed by the model.

CONCLUSIONS

Geochemical equilibrium models can be used successfully in risk assessments concerning potential groundwater migration of inorganic contaminants. The process of validating these models for regulatory purposes, however, will require a quantitative statistical overlay that will examine each process (and each ionizable species) on an individual basis. Generally, the quantity of supporting experimental data required for each facet of the model will be inversely proportional to the degree of confidence in the ability to describe these processes. Validation in a regulatory sense differs from that associated with a scientific perspective in two fundamental ways. First, in those processes where uncertainty is significant, errors must be biased toward the conservative direction (i.e., protective of the environment). Second, depending on the statistical uncertainty, the final model will lie somewhere on a continuum between purely conservative assumptions and scientific accuracy.

The application of the principles of geochemical equilibrium theory to describe the partitioning behavior of inorganic ionizable contaminants will require a diverse collection of individual processes derived from a large collection of sub-disciplines. Pure phase precipitation, solid solution precipitation, oxidation-reduction, complexation, and adsorption processes will all be involved in the operational model. With the present implementation strategy, however, time dependency (or kinetic) limitations to the common assumption of equilibrium must be addressed by judiciously either ignoring selected thermodynamic constants or adjusting the constants to describe phases characterized as being hydrous or amorphous.

Acknowledgments:

The authors would like to express appreciation to Drs. Reva Rubenstein and Zubair Saleem (EPA Office of Solid Waste) for their support in this work. Gratitude is expressed to Dr. David Dzombak for his assistance in incorporating the MIT Diffuse Layer Model into the MINTEQA2 code. The authors acknowledge the contributions from Dr. Everett Jenne for analytical support used in this work. The authors would like to thank Dr. Wayne Garrison, Dr. Bob Swank and Mr. Bob Ryans for editing the manuscript.

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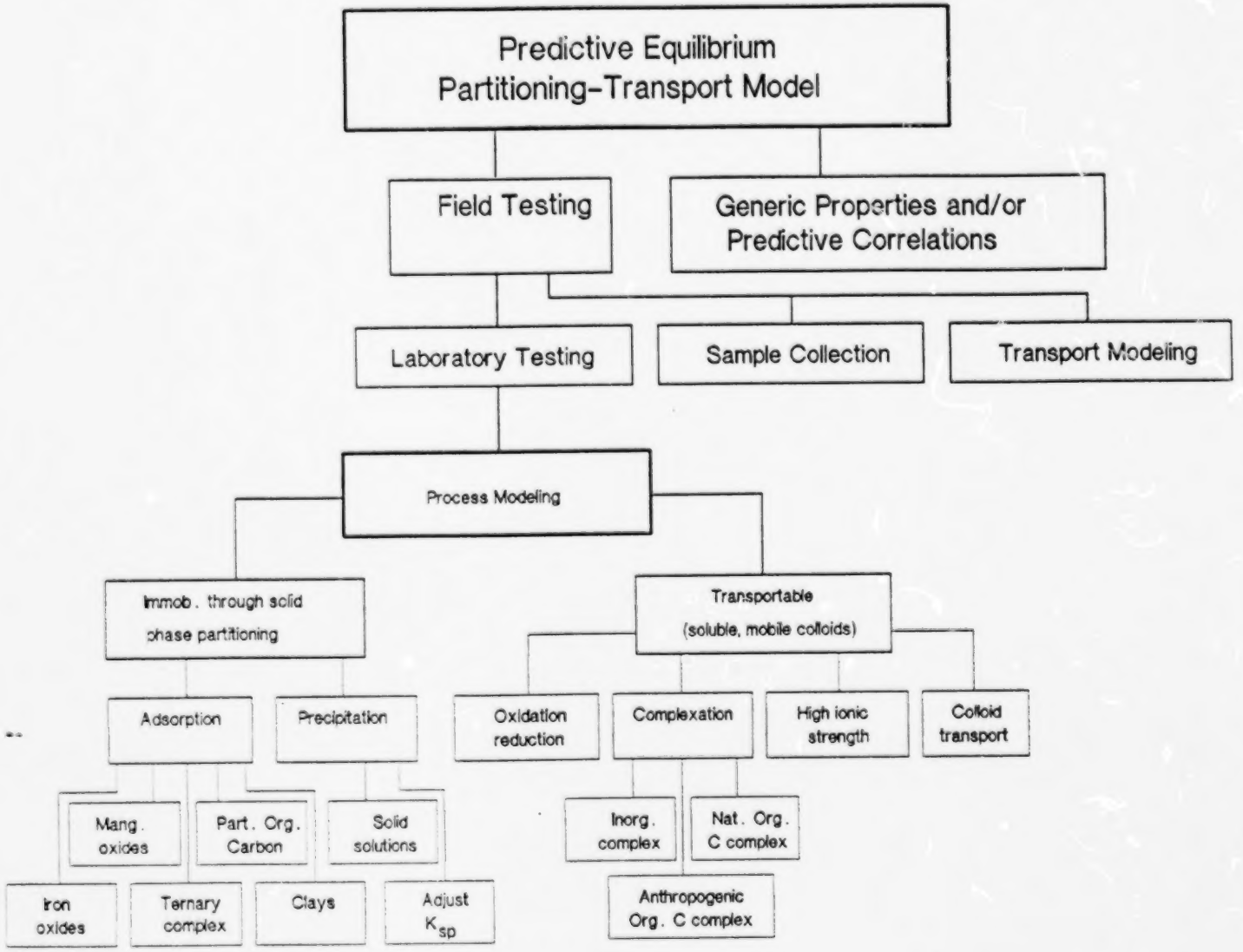

Figure 1. Schema for incorporating transport and geochemical process models into a prospective defensible regulatory tool.

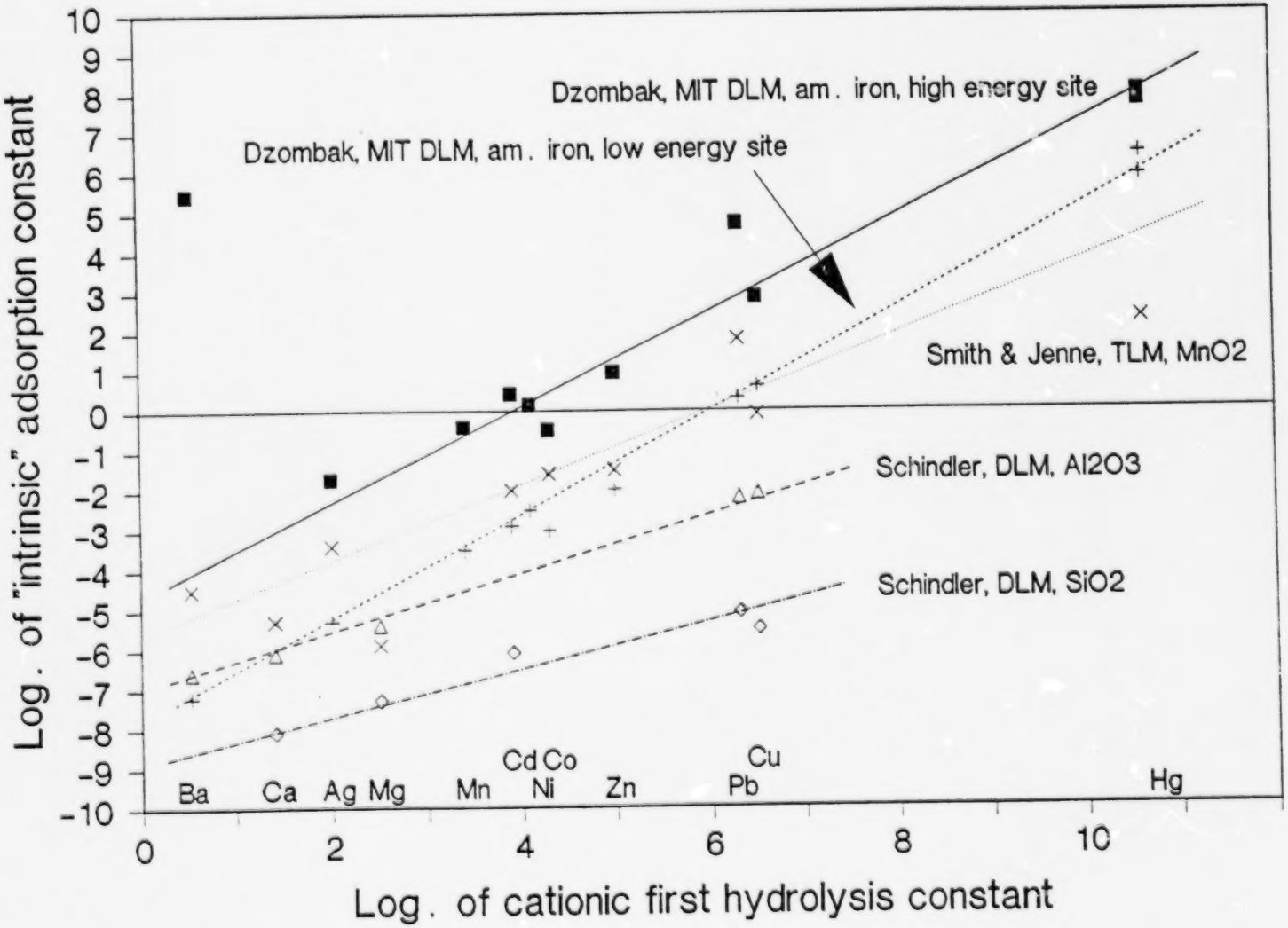

Figure 2. Relationships between metal ion first hydrolyses constants and intrinsic adsorption constants for a variety of surfaces and three adsorption models.

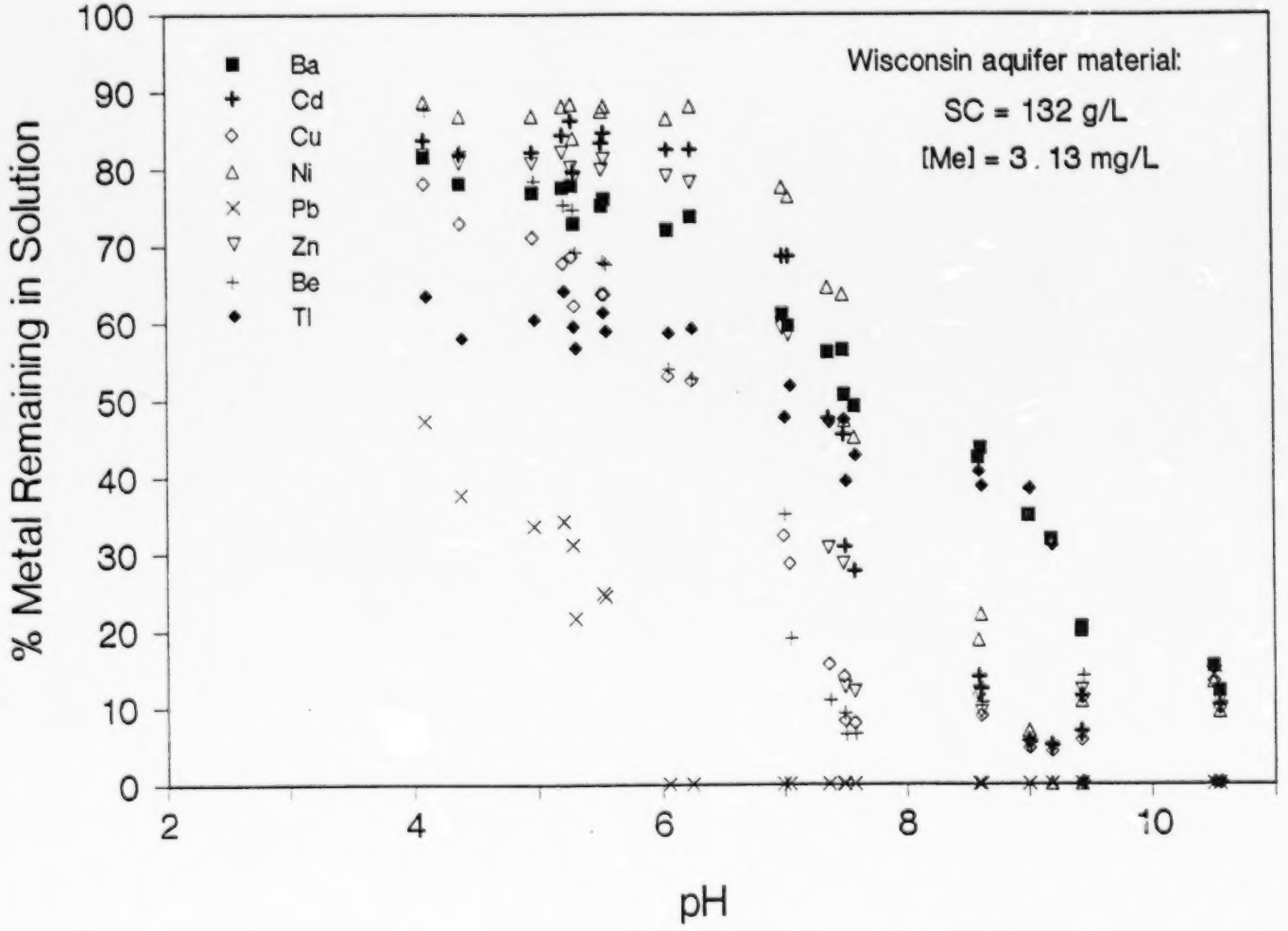

Figure 3. Experimental pH-dependent partitioning data for Ba, Be, Cd, Cu, Ni, Pb, Tl and Zn with the high sand content Wisconsin aquifer material.

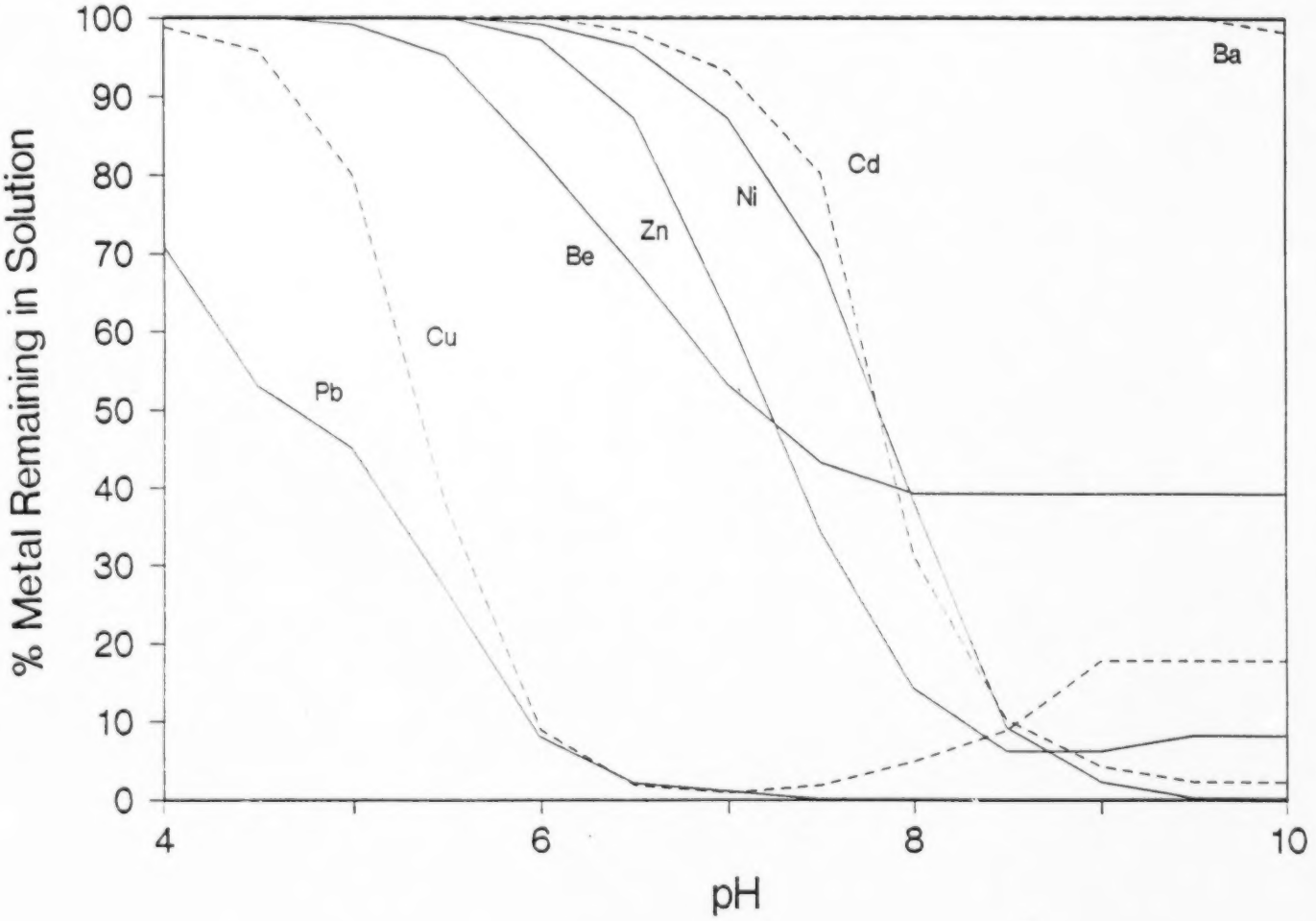

Figure 4. MINTEQA2 simulations of the data depicted in Figure 3. Partitioning mechanisms include adsorption with aquifer material amorphous iron and precipitation of insoluble hydroxides, sulfates and carbonates.

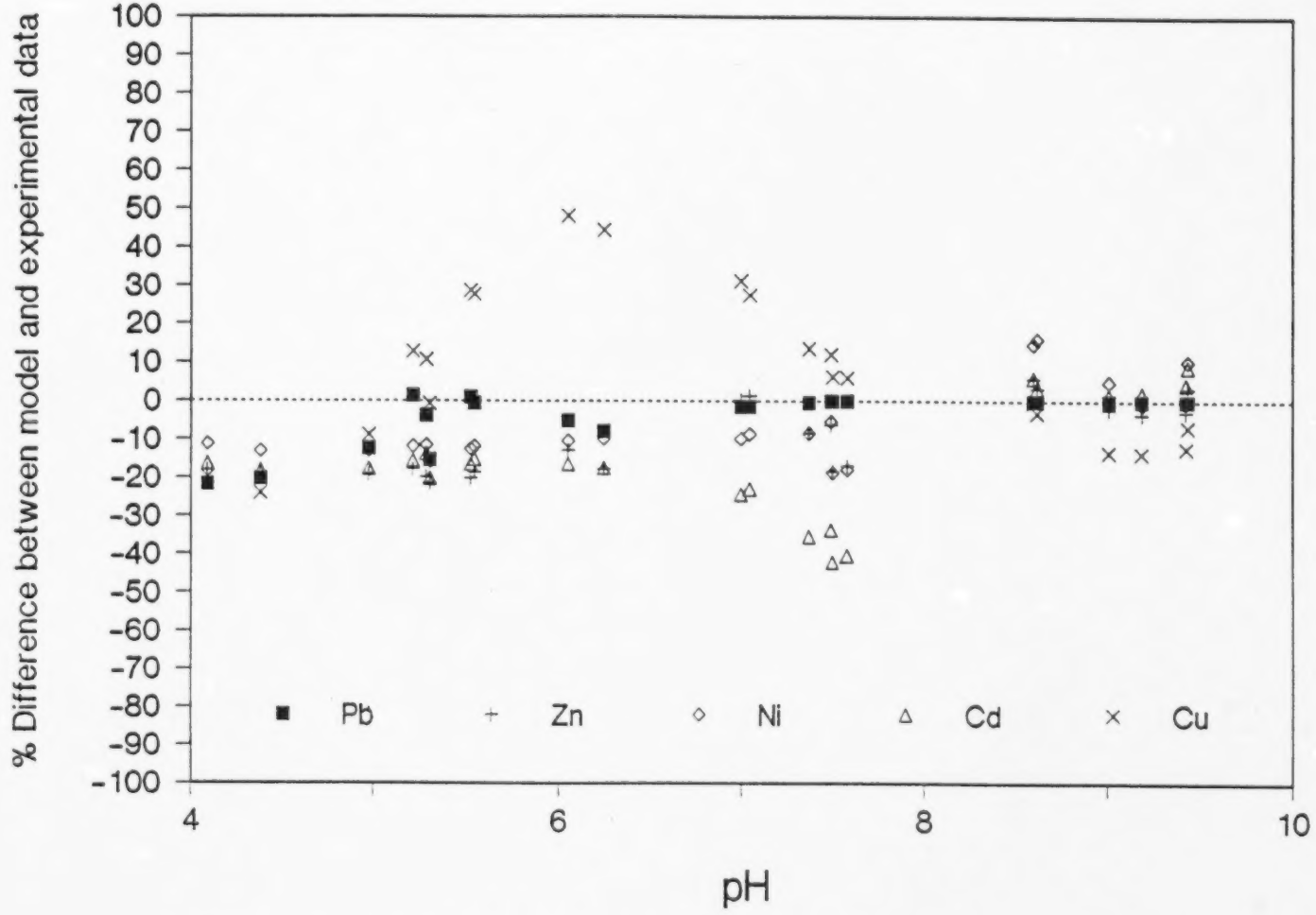

Figure 5. Comparison of experimental and modeled data as a function of pH for Pb, Zn, Ni, Cu and Cd. Data points below the "zero" line represent conservative estimates; proximity to the "zero" line represents scientific accuracy.